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ABSTRACT
        The research goals of this study were to determine
the special school needs of single-parent children; the effectiveness
of schools in addressing those needs; and school policies, programs,
and practices that would better address the needs of these children.
Subjects were principals of Iowa schools with seventh and eighth
grades; single parents of children in the schools; and experts in
Iowa's Department of Public Instruction and other public and private
social service agencies. Of the 510 principals who were mailed
surveys, 391 responded and, a total of 398 single parents responded.
A two-phase design was used. Data collected in the exploratory phase
were obtained from 30 interviews of the principals, parents, and
experts. In the verificational phase, a four-part survey instrument
asked respondents to: (1) rate the importance of identified special
needs of single-parent children; (2) confirm the existence and rate
the importance of 25 specific school policies, programs, and
practices; (3) evaluate the school's effectiveness in meeting the
needs of single-parent children; and (4) provide personal and
professional background information. Results showed that respondents
agreed on four broad areas of special need: (1) stability and
structure; (2) social acceptance; (3) parental involvement in
education; and (4) children's need to spend time with adults. Other
results are discussed. There are 51 citations. (RH)

SCHOOL NEEDS OF SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE GRADES:

A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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SCHOOL NEEDS OF SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE GRADES:
A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Historically, schools have responded to special needs of children with specialized, focused educational programs. Programs like Title I, special education, and at risk programs have applied programmatic treatments to specific, cognitive, and clearly defined problems. This approach has been less effective in addressing larger contemporary societal problems that affect children. Schools have made limited use of the diagnostic approach to address the effects of changing family structure. This paper will examine the specific policies, programs, and practices that have been used to meet the school needs of single-parent children and will suggest a comprehensive approach to address the effect of family structure on children's school performance.

Background and Related Literature

In the past 20 years, there has been a constant redefinition of family life (Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, Nastasi, & Lightel, 1986). The number of single-parent families has grown at a dramatic rate as the number of all children being raised by single parents doubled from 12 to 24 percent between 1970 and 1988 (U. S. Bureau of the Census [BOC], 1989).

The educational and economic deprivation that often characterize single-parent homes (Amundson, 1988; Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Epstein, 1984; McLanahan, Garfinkel, & Ooms, 1987; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsberg, 1986; Mueller & Cooper, 1986; Norton & Glick, 1986; Schlesinger, 1985; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) may affect children's school performance. The lower income levels of

single-parent families have the most significant impact on children's school performance (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987; McLanahan, Garfinkel, & Ooms, 1987; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsberg, 1986; Schlesinger, 1985). The significant drop in income in divorced families is even more significant than a constant income level, whatever it may be (Allers, 1982-1983; Clarke-Stewart, 1989).

Socioeconomic disadvantages may affect stability and structure in the single-parent home. Stability is a key component that is needed but often missing in the lives of single-parent children (Amato, 1987; Arnsberg-Diamond, 1985; Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Schlesinger, 1985; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These children also need the structure of an organized environment with clearly established and consistently enforced rules. However, members of single-parent homes rate them as less cohesive, less organized, less controlling, less supportive, and more independent than two-parent homes (Amato, 1987).

Lack of stability in a new single-parent home can have negative effects on children's personal development (Bernard, 1978; Bundy & Gumaer, 1984; Kurdeck, 1983; Roy & Fugua, 1983; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Initial emotional reactions include anger, depression, guilt, fear, and embarrassment (Bernard, 1978; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1980; Kurdeck, 1983). In school, children may be restless, have difficulty concentrating, and be preoccupied with their worries (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). They may feel reduced self-esteem, a diminished sense of belonging, and severe loss of security (Bundy & Gumaer, 1984; Roy & Fugua, 1983) which may result

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in loss of popularity (Bernard, 1984) and fewer interactions with peers (Devall, Stoneman, & Brody, 1986).

Conflicting opinions exist on the effect of single-parent rearing on children's academic achievement. The first large-scale study of school behavior of single-parent children reported lower academic achievement as well as serious behavioral problems (Brown, 1980). Other researchers report findings of lower reading and IQ scores (Dawson, 1981) and an initial lag in academic achievement after the creation of a single-parent family (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In an extensive analysis of other studies, Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman (1983) found very small differences on IQ tests, standardized achievement tests, and grade point averages from those of two-parent children, particularly when socioeconomic status was taken into consideration.

To respond effectively to these complex and contradictory needs, school administrators must set the overall tone of the school by accepting the single-parent home as a legitimate family structure (NAESP, 1980) interpreting this structure to the community (Stern, 1987) and creating comprehensive policies (Fuller, 1986) to address local needs (Arnsberg-Diamond, 1985).

Schools have responded to needs of single-parent children with specific, focused programs and practices. Curricular approaches include courses dealing with family structure (Benedek & Benedek, 1979) and survival skills (Holzman, 1984), tutoring (Krein, 1986), parenting skills classes (Brown, 1980; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979), and staff development programs about characteristics and needs of

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these children (Baruth & Bruggraf, 1984; Fuller, 1986; Holzman, 1984). Other school responses include individual and group counseling (Baruth & Burggraf, 1984; Holzman, 1984; Lynch, 1988; Riley, 1981; Shea, 1982); supervised care programs (Brown, 1980, Lynch, 1988), especially those with educational opportunities (Krein, 1986); and school personnel to serve as role models, mentors, and father substitutes (Lynch, 1988; Schlesinger, 1970).

Schools should assume a multi-faceted role to address the broad societal issues confronting single-parent families (Armstrong-Dillard, 1980; Weiss, 1979). Schools serve as the major socializing institution for children (Skeen & McKenry, 1980), often assuming responsibilities that are being abandoned by families (Hofferth, 1987) and providing a linkage between school and family (Epstein, 1984). They are ideal institutions to provide children with the structure and stability that is often missing in single-parent homes (Appel, 1985; Liston, 1984; Ourth, 1980; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

The school may use two approaches to address the needs of single-parent children (Bernard, 1984). The first approach deals incrementally with daily problems on a specific issue-by-issue basis. T other approach proactively looks at the special needs of single-parent children more generally and tries to develop a philosophical model for addressing them. Regardless of the approach, school services should be determined by the primary responsibility of the school to educate children (Cantor, 1977; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979; Morawetz & Walker, 1984). School

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problems of single-parent children should be looked at in the context of their origin--the school (Morawetz & Walker, 1984). Schools must be willing to provide support to single-parent chi'.dren to meet their primary responsibility of helping children learn at their highest potential (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979).

Statement of the Problem

The structure of the American family has undergone dramatic changes in the last 20 years as the single-parent home has become a prevalent living situation for many children. While much research has focused on the problems of these children in areas of academic achievement, affective behavior, and discipline, inadequate attention has been given to defining the school's role in identifying and responding to the problems of single-parent children. This study sought to discover any special school needs of children being raised in single-parent families and to identify existing and needed school policies, programs, and practices to address those needs. The study also sought to examine the differences in perceptions of single parents and school administrators to clarify the roles of home and school.

Significance of the Study

This study provided a conceptual framework to define the schools' role in meeting the needs of single-parent children and to delineate specific areas of home, school, and community responsibility. It further suggested ways in which these three organizations may utilize their individual strengths to collaborate in providing services. The findings of this study should assist

local school administrators in determining community expectations and in defining their roles. The findings also should assist state policy makers in identifying needed policies to provide for the educational and social service needs of single parents and their children. The finding that many needs for policies, programs, and practices that could be addressed by social service agencies other than the school provides a broader conceptual basis to identify areas of interagency cooperation.

Research Procedures

The research goals of this study were to determine the special school needs of single-parent children; the effectiveness of schools in addressing those needs; and additional school policies, programs, and practices that are needed to better address the needs of these children. Determination of the overall design strategy for this study depended upon the preferability of qualitative or quantitative research methods. A combination of methodologies was selected for a combination of reasons. First, the research objectives included a variety of conceptual frameworks: the delineation of student needs, the identification of programmatic responses to need, and the evaluation of programs. Second, the knowledge and opinions of the two populations to be studied, school principals and single parents, could vary considerably. Therefore, it was determined that a combination of research methodologies would be essential to elicit the variety of information sought from the two populations. Katz (1953) confirms this opinion, stating that qualitative and quantitative research methodologies can be

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viewed, not as alternative approaches to research, but as "supplementary procedures which can be used most effectively in combination" (p. 58). Therefore, a two-phase design was selected to discover student need and to evaluate the effectiveness of school response to need.

In the two-phase design, the initial qualitative phase was exploratory in nature. The answers to questions were not sought so much as the appropriate questions to ask. A flexible, relatively unstructured methodology was needed to elicit this type of information. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) identify qualitative interviewing as a dynamic, flexible research tool that aids the researcher in "not merely obtaining answers, but [in] learning what questions to ask and how to ask them" (p. 77).

The questions raised in the exploratory phase would assist in formulation of concepts to guide the research in the verificational phase. Since the purpose of the verificational phase was to confirm the importance and existence of specific school programs as responses to need, a quantitative measure of frequency was determined to be the appropriate methodology. Therefore, a survey was selected to determine attitudes and beliefs of the two respondent groups. Weisberg, Korsnick, and Bowen (1989) support this decision, noting that the survey is particularly effective in comparing the attitudes and beliefs of different groups of people. The survey instrument included nominal and Likert scale items to verify special needs; determine the existence of policies, programs, and practices; and suggest important additional policies,

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programs, and practices to further address those needs.

The study focuses on children in the seventh and eighth grades. Children in the middle grades were selected because they are in a transitional age which may make school adjustment due to changes in family structure difficult. All children around ages 10 to 12 experience the most difficulties in school (Drake, 1979).

Schools were selected to participate in the study from school districts that were representative of all districts in the state. All school districts in the state that included the seventh and eighth grades were eligible. Three variables applicable to the research objectives were used to identify a representative cross-section of districts: percentage of single-parent children, local ability to pay or district wealth, and district size. The percentage of students receiving AFDC benefits served as a proxy indicator of percentage of single-parent children. District ability to pay was determined by equalized valuation per member. Total enrollment was used to classify districts by size. School districts were categorized into twelve classifications by cross-tabbing high or low percentage of AFDC students, high or low ability to pay, and being small, medium, or large.

Methodology

Data collection for the exploratory phase consisted of thirty depth interviews of principals and single parents of children in the seventh and eighth grades and experts with educational and social service agencies. The principal and a single parent were interviewed in one school containing the seventh and eighth grades

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in each of the twelve categories of representative school districts. Experts within the state Department of Public Instruction and with other public and private social service agencies were identified to participate using Powers' (1965) reputational technique. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and three hours. The interviews were conducted over a two-month period (January and February 1990). Most interviews took place in the interviewee's office or at the school.

All interviews were open ended. Initially, respondents were asked to share their perceptions about special needs of single-parent children. Then they were asked to identify ways in which schools respond to those needs and to suggest additional ways that schools might respond to the needs of these children.

Notes from the interviews were analyzed in detail to formulate concepts for the development of the survey instrument for the verificational phase. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative methods was used to develop concepts. The researcher simultaneously coded and analyzed data. Specific incidents were compared to refine concepts, identify their properties, explore their relationships, and integrate them into a coherent theory. Preliminary data analysis revealed special needs common to single-parent children and identifiable school policies, programs, and practices to meet those needs.

Analysis of the interview data coupled with a second review of the literature and Shirley and Caruthers' (1979) framework of organizational dimensions guided the development of the survey

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instrument. The survey consisted of four parts. Part I asked respondents to rate the importance of identified special needs of single-parent children on a five-point Likert scale. Part II asked respondents to rate the existence and importance of 25 specific school policies, programs, and practices on nominal and Likert scales respectively. Part III asked respondents to evaluate overall school effectiveness in meeting needs of single-parent children and to make open-ended comments about school effectiveness. Part IV asked for personal and professional background information to aid in interpreting survey results.

The survey was piloted by the group of school administrators and single parents who participated in the exploratory phase. They completed the survey as if they actually were participating in the verificational phase. Then, in a telephone conversation with the researcher they critiqued the survey for clarity as well as inclusion, omission, and appropriateness of specific items.

For the verificational phase, the population of 510 principals in the state whose buildings included the seventh and eighth grades received a copy of the survey. Ran mly selected samples of single parents in one school containing the seventh and eighth grades in each of the twelve district categories received a survey. A total of 389 single parents in the twelve schools were surveyed.

Dillman's (1978) model guided implementation of the survey. Procedures included an initial mailing with a cover letter to explain the purpose of the survey and two follow-up reminder postcards. The researcher personally handled all mailings to

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principals and parents in seven districts. Due to principals'
concerns about releasing names and addresses, school secretaries
handled mailings of surveys to single parents in five schools under
the researcher's supervision.

A total of 391 or 77 percent of all principals returned a
completed survey that was eligible for data analysis. A total of
.53 or 65 percent of all single parents returned a completed
survey. Two percent of those surveys were not eligible for data
analysis due to changes in the single-parent state; therefore, 63
percent of parent surveys were eligible for data analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey items.
These included frequency and distribution of responses, the percent
of responses in each category, and the mean, median, and standard
deviation. F tests were computed to determine statistically
significant differences between responses of administrators and
parents. Chi-squares were computed to analyze ordinal and nominal
items of background information.

Limitations of data collection included an under-
representation of minority single parents resulting from a lack of
geographic distribution of samples. Due to problems of access,
samples were clustered in three geographic areas in the state.
This clustering meant that fewer than 10 percent of single-parent
respondents were minorities. This limitation makes generalizing
findings to all single-parent situations in the state impossible.

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Findings

A summary of qualitative findings from the exploratory phase
will be compared to survey findings from the verificational phase.
Salient survey findings will be summarized in tables to support
broad conceptual findings that emerged in both phases.

Special Need.   Interview and survey findings show that
principals and single parents agreed on four broad areas of special
need. However, they sometimes disagreed on the relative importance
of those needs.   A summary of the survey findings of special
needs appears in Table 1. Mean responses are given for principals,
single parents, and total respondents for 10 special needs that
were identified by interviewees. Respondents were asked to rate
each need on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from a response of 1
which indicated that a need was very important to a response of 5
which indicated that a need was very unimportant. No statistically
significant difference exists between responses of principals and
parents though there are slight differences in overall rankings.

Stability/Structure.   Interview respondents agreed that
single-parent children need stability and structure in their lives.
They felt that lowered socioeconomic status of single-parent
families means a loss of stability and structure as families must
change their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

Respondents disagreed on critical conditions to provide
stability and structure. While principals felt parents lacked time
and personal resources to provide stable homes, parents felt that
they could maintain stability and structure by having strong

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Table 1

Survey Findings of Special Needs (Mean Responses) of Single-Parent
Children

Special Need	Principals	Parents	Total Respondents
Sharing feelings	1.5167	1.4108	1.4762
Parent attendance	1.5064	1.4440	1.4825
Consistent rules	1.4396	1.6100	1.5048
Feelings of belonging	1.6067	1.6017	1.6048
Attendance at same school	2.0720	1.9917	2.0413
Adult role models	1.9692	2.2697	2.0841
Same types of clothes	2.1568	2.1286	2.1460
Extra help with homework	2.3805	2.0124	2.2397
Extra time with adults	2.2648	2.3278	2.2889
Residence in same home	2.3136	2.3029	2.3095

support systems of family and friends. Principals felt that consistently requiring children to follow established rules in the home is the most effective way to provide stability and structure while parents felt that this need was less critical.

Three survey items addressed issues of stability and structure (see Table 1). All respondents felt that enforcing consistent rules in the home (combined mean response of 1.5048) is more critical than either attendance at the same school (combined mean response of 2.0413) or continuing to live in the same residence (combined mean response of 2.3095).

Social Acceptance. Interview respondents agreed that single-parent children need to feel accepted and not different from other children. Both respondent groups were aware of the importance of not stigmatizing these children. Principals felt that no stigmatism of single-parent children exists. In many cases, they were reluctant to identify special needs or programs for fear of appearing discriminatory. Parents, however, felt that such discrimination exists in schools in general attitudes of staff members and limited opportunities for their children.

Survey respondents ranked "feelings of belonging" as the fourth most critical need with a combined mean response of 1.6048 (see Table 1). They felt that wearing the same types of clothes as other children, a need identified by interviewees, was less critical with a combined mean response of 2.1460 (see Table 1).

Parental Involvement in Education. Single-parent children have a greater need for their parents to be involved in both

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academic and non-academic areas of school. Academically, they need additional help with homework; however, their parents lack the time and, in some cases, academic skills to help them. It is also important that parents attend school events so that their children feel motivated to participate.

Survey respondents felt that parent attendance at school events is the second most important need with a combined mean response of 1.4825 (see Table 1). However, all respondents ranked "extra help with homework" as being less critical with a mean response of 2.2397 (see Table 1).

Adult Attention. Single-parent children need to spend extra time with adults, especially to talk about their feelings. They also need sympathetic teachers to serve as positive role models.

Survey respondents ranked "sharing feelings with adults" as the most critical need with a mean response of 1.4762 (see Table 1). Survey respondents ranked adult role models as the sixth most critical need with a mean response of 2.0841 (see Table 1). All respondents considered spending extra time with adults to be less critical with a mean response of 2.2889 (see Table 1).

Importance and Existence of Policies, Programs, and Practices. In both phases of the study, principals and single parents recognized the importance and existence of the following general areas of policy, program, and practice: communication, counseling, supervised activity, and interagency cooperation. While they agreed on the importance of these general areas, they

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disagreed on the relative importance (see Table 2) and existence (see Table 3) of specific approaches in these areas.

Table 2 summarizes the ten policies, programs, and practices that principals and single parents ranked as most important in addressing needs of single-parent children. Those items with lower mean scores were perceived as more important based on the 5-point Likert scale. A response of "1" indicated that a policy, program, or practice was very important, and a response of "5" indicated that a policy, program, or practice was very unimportant. For those items with an asterisk, a statistically significant difference in means exists between perceptions of principals and parents.

Table 3 summarizes the ten policies, programs, and practices that combined responses of principals and single parents ranked as the most commonly in existence. Items with higher means were perceived as more commonly in existence. In the rating scale, a response of "yes" to an item's existence was coded as a 3, a response of "don't know" was coded as a 2, and a response of "no" was coded as a 1. For those items with an asterisk, a statistically significant difference in means exists between perceptions of principals and parents.

Communication. Respondents agreed that communication between home and school is the most important practice to address special needs. They also agreed that more informal, personal communication is needed. Contact procedures that provide easily accessible channels for parents to communicate with the school are essential

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Table 2

Rank Order (Means) of Importance of School Policies, Programs, and
Practices by Respondent Groups

Policy, Program, or Practice	Principals	Parents	Total Respondents
Personal communication	1.3856	1.3154	1.3587
Contact procedures	1.3959	1.4025	1.3984
Scheduling conferences	1.5013	1.4481	1.4810
Student assistance programs	1.5398	1.4647	1.5111
Tutoring	1.7763	1.4274	1.6429*
Variety of activities	1.7095	1.7925	1.7413
Counseling with counselor	1.7095	1.8672	1.7698*
Interagency cooperation	1.8149	2.0083	1.8889*
Group advisement	1.9075	1.9751	1.9333
Children's support groups	1.9100	1.9876	1.9397

*Statistically significant difference in perceptions at .05 level.

Table 3

Rank Order (Means) of Existence of School Policies, Programs, and Practices by Respondent Groups

Policy, Program, or Practice	Principals	Parents	Total Respondents
Scheduling conferences	2.8997	2.8797	2.8921
Contact procedures	2.9075	2.7552	2.8492*
Personal communication	2.9460	2.6805	2.8444*
Variety of activities	2.7892	2.6598	2.7397*
Student assistance programs	2.7069	2.3485	2.5698*
Counseling with counselor	2.7635	2.1369	2.5238*
Interagency cooperation	2.7738	2.0166	2.4841*
Scheduling activities for children	2.5476	2.1867	2.4095*
Referral to other agencies	2.6735	1.9668	2.4032*
Tutoring	2.4936	2.2490	2.4000*

*Statistically significant difference in perceptions at .05 level.

for more effective communications. Principals identified conferences as an important component of home-school communication while parents felt that other informal means are more critical.

Survey findings support the importance of communication. The three survey items receiving t e highest mean scores are components of home-school communications identified in interviews: (1) personal written or verbal communication from teachers to parents about their children's progress received a combined mean score by all respondents of 1.3587; (2) procedures for parents to contact the school with questions and concerns received a combined mean score of 1.3984; and (3) scheduling of parent-teacher conferences received a combined mean score of 1.4810. These combined mean scores and the fact that there is no statistically significant difference in perceptions suggests that both respondent groups agree on the importance of maintaining home-school communications.

Survey findings also support the existence of these three components of home-school communications (see Table 3). Combined responses rank scheduling conferences as the item most commonly in existence with a mean score of 2.8921, contact procedures as second in existence with a combined mean score of 2.8492, and personal communication as third most commonly in existence with a combined mean score of 2.8444. A statistically significant difference in perceptions exists at the .05 level as principals felt contact procedures and communication are more commonly in existence.

Counseling. Interviewees agreed that single-parent children sometimes need help through various forms of counseling. Effective

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forms of counseling include student advisement programs, children's support groups, and student assistance programs. Principals and single parents disagreed on the roles of specific school professionals in counseling children. Principals felt that the guidance counselor and social worker were key personnel to talk with children; parents were more concerned that their children's teachers be sympathetic and available to talk with them.

Survey findings support the importance of counseling as well as the specific forms of counseling identified in the interview data (see Table 2). Four of the ten items identified as being the most important relate to counseling. Student assistance programs received a combined mean score of 1.511 which places it as the fourth most important item. Meeting with the counselor, the seventh most important item, received a combined mean score of 1.7698. However, principals considered meeting with the counselor to be more important than parents at a statistically significant level. The ninth and tenth most important items, group advisement and children's support groups, received combined mean scores of 1.9333 and 1.9397 respectively. The general agreement about these items indicates the importance that principals and single parents attach to various forms of counseling.

Existence items show that two of the four most important counseling practices are also commonly in existence (see Table 3). Student assistance programs were identified as being the fifth item most commonly in existence with a combined mean score of 2.5698. Meeting with the guidance counselor was the item respondents ranked

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sixth with a combined mean score of 2.5238. Statistically significant differences in perceptions between principals and parents exist at the .05 level for both of these items as principals feel that these practices are more commonly in existence.

Supervised Activity. Single-parent interviewees felt that supervised activity was more important than principals. Supervised activity included tutoring and before- and after-school study time and recreational activities. While both groups felt that these programs were important, parents clearly expressed a greater need for them than principals. Parents especially expressed a need for tutoring to supplement their own limited time and academic skills.

Survey findings support the difference in perceptions about the importance of tutoring (see Table 2). While tutoring was identified as the fifth most important item with a combined mean score of 1.6429, single parents felt that tutoring was statistically more important than principals at the .05 level. Survey responderts also recognized the importance of a variety of activities for single-parent children; this item was identified as sixth in importance with a combined mean score of 1.7413.

Survey responses indicate agreement on the existence of supervised activities (see Table 3). Combined mean scores of 2.7397 rank a variety of activities for children as fourth most commonly in existence. The scheduling of these activities ranked eighth in existence with a combined mean score of 2.4095. Tutoring ranked tenth in existence with a combined mean score of 2.4000.

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For all items dealing with supervised activity, differences in perceptions were statistically significant at the .05 level; in each case, principals felt practices were more commonly in existence than single parents.

Interagency Services. Principals felt that working with other agencies for referral and provision of services was more important than single parents. Principals felt that schools may recommend services for any family problem that affects a child's education; parents felt that recommending such services was not the school's responsibility and that the school should not become involved.

Survey findings support the difference in perceptions about the importance of interagency cooperation (see Table 2). Though interagency cooperation is identified as the eighth most important item with a combined mean score of 1.8889, principals consider it to be more important than single parents at the .05 level.

Survey findings about the existence of interagency services agree with the difference in perceptions about the importance of these practices (see Table 3). Interagency cooperation ranked as the practice seventh most commonly in existence with a combined mean score of 2.4841, and interagency referral ranked as ninth most commonly in existence with a combined mean score of 2.4032. For both of these interagency services, differences in perceptions were statistically significant at the .05 level with principals regarding them as more commonly in existence.

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Implications

This study sought specific methods to address the needs of single-parent children. While respondents recognized the importance of specific policies, programs, and practices, the most critical needs involved complex issues that may not be addressed effectively through narrow, specific programmatic responses. The broader issues of structure of the single-parent family, role of the school, and home-school communications have a direct effect on the development of specific policies and programs. While specific responses are important in addressing needs of children, no one program can be effective unless these major issues are addressed.

Structure of the Family

Schlesinger's (1985) recognition of the difficulty in defining the single-parent family for research purposes was supported by the complex family structures that emerged in this study. The commonly accepted definition of one parent and children living in the same household omits other family structures that may create special need. Three types of parents were identified in this study: remarried single parents, unmarried single parents who live together, and supportive nonresidential adults who assume an active parenting role. Some respondents considered these to be single-parent situations while others did not. Based on open-ended comments by single parents in both phases of the study, active involvement in parenting is the critical variable that identifies an adult as a parent. Relatives and non-relatives may assume the parenting role whether or not they actually live with a child.

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Conversely, adults who live with a child in a natural or legal relationship may not assume the parenting role and, therefore, may not be considered a second parent by the natural parent.

These findings indicate that schools must collect information locally about the families they serve to determine special needs resulting from family structure. This information should be used to determine the responsibilities of both the family and the school. Since active involvement in parenting is the critical variable that determines need in the single-parent family, schools also should develop practices to encourage the participation of custodial and non-custodial natural parents, stepparents, and other adults who have a role in a child's life.

Role of School

Principals and single parents agreed that the school's role is to educate children and to teach them to be responsible individuals. They disagreed, however, on the extent of that role as it relates to involvement in parenting. Many principals felt that single parents expected schools to discipline children, provide adult attention and role models, and teach children behaviors that previously have been taught in the home. Single parents clearly felt competent to provide their children with the type of parenting they considered appropriate to their family situations. They were more concerned that schools provide additional educational assistance to their children through tutoring and supervised study time and a greater variety of flexibly scheduled extracurricular activities.

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While principals and single parents disagreed on the school's involvement in parenting, they agreed that schools should provide children with safe, stable environments. Schools may provide stability and structure through predictable routines and schedules, required assignments, consistent rules, and reasonable expectations. School districts may amend policies about residence in attendance districts so that children may have the stability of remaining in the same school if the family must move. The need for a stable environment also may be provided through an extended school day that includes before and after school supervised care and educational and recreational activities.

"Real" Communication

"Real communication" was identified repeatedly as the most essential response to student need. Real communication is informal, personalized, two-way contact between teachers and parents to solve individual students' problems. Real communication requires clearly understood contact procedures that establish networks for parents and teachers to share information and questions in a timely manner. Principals and parents disagreed about who should initiate contact. Principals felt that single parents should initiate contact by informing the school of changing family situations. Parents felt that the school should initiate contact early in the school year to establish a communication network. Schools could initiate two-way communication by making home visits and telephone contacts to establish ongoing contact between home and school.

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Recommendations for Further Research

The number of adults actively involved in the parenting of children defines the single-parent family. The emergence of new single-parent family structures including the never married single parent and the adoptive single parent further complicates refining the concept of single-parent family. Further research is needed to identify the critical variables of the single-parent family that produce needs of children unique to this family structure.

Over-representation of minority and poor children in single-parent families may create needs that result, not from being raised by single parents, but from conditions of social, cultural, and economic disadvantage. Further research is needed to distinguish which needs result from family structure and from disadvantages of race and socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

This study examined existing and needed specific policies, programs, and practices to address needs of single-parent children. Findings revealed that needs are complex, vary immensely depending upon individual circumstances, and do not lend themselves well to specific, narrowly defined treatments. Rather, they are pervasive needs for structure and stability, personal attention from caring adults, and occasional help with specific problems related to changes in home situations. These needs cannot be addressed by creating specific policies, programs, and practices that at best are too restricted to solve these general problems and at worst likely to be labelled as discriminatory.

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The most effective methods to address the needs of single-parent children are the continuation and improvement of many policies, programs, and practices already in existence. Specifically, schools must establish more accessible communication between home and school. Schools also must evaluate local family situations to be responsive to community needs. School administrators must provide the role model for staff by being sensitive and responsive to individual student needs and must provide staff members with resources to be better informed educators. Creation of new programs would be expensive and ineffective if the total school organization is not responsive to these pervasive needs for communication, attention, and sensitivity to individual situations. Schools must employ a generalized approach to respond to the complexity of changing family structures.

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